

The B-List: 4/18

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Tuesday, April 19 2011 2:49 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, April 19 2011 3:05 PM

Last night's game had a little something for everyone: both starters were sharp for long stretches and were ultimately bailed out by their defense. And then the relievers came in and began flinging the ball all over creation, and the offenses began digging into their bags of Squander Ball Tricks, and then a baserunning clinic was not held.

We won because their best defender made an error and our worst hitter got a big hit.

You know, just par for the course.

FINAL

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Indians (12-4)

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Royals (10-6)

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W: J. Smiff (1-0)

L: T. Collins (1-1)

Well, this is the sort of dogfight you expect from the 1st and 2nd place ballclubs. And then you replace dogs with drunken seagulls, then with box jellyfish, then with irritated fiddler crabs, and finally bring one of the dogs back to face a kangaroo mouse with lumbago.

1) Picking nits for no fun and absolutely no profit

One of the obsessions of a baseball analyst is to try to determine what things that have happened suggest about the relative likeliness of something happening in the future. For example, if Fausto Carmona induces double-digit groundouts in sixteen consecutive starts, and pitch f/X shows significant downward movement on his pitches, and you watch video and he's throwing sinkers with late movement that guys are beating into the ground, it's not too much of a stretch to suggest that unless something significant changes, Fausto Carmona is likely to induce a lot of ground balls in his remaining starts.

You have to constantly update your data, as it were: if he begins losing velocity or starts throwing nothing but knuckleballs or gets a tattoo of Bert Blyleven with the caption "60 HR or bust!", well, you have to adjust your expectations for such things.

But the guiding principle of analysis is that without new information, you expect things to go pretty much as you've observed them go.

The distinction in recent times is what you mean by "things" has become more nuanced. Instead of expecting a pitcher to collect Wins, you gain an appreciation for just how OTHER-dependent a thing like Wins are and instead make predictions based on things that are more INdependent.

As long as you're trying to predict something that is actually kind of predictable, you'll probably make some reasonably good predictions.

Predicting that Jack Hannahan will hit fastballs thrown at more than 90 mph to other way is pretty reasonable: predicting that Jack Hannahan will always produce extra-base hits in extra innings is not.

I have reached a bit of an impasse with Carlos Carrasco, as I can't entirely tell which of his traits have predictive value and which don't. Through five innings of work, Carrasco gave up two hits, although one was a booming double to Jeff Francoeur that ultimately produced KC's first run.

He had 4 strikeouts against 1 walk (the Royals have been leading the AL in walks in the early going, so this is more notable than it might sound) and his pitch count was reasonably low buoyed by 3 perfect innings in 5.

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He looked thoroughly in control of a Royals lineup that has to this point been pretty productive as an offense.

And then in the span of seven pitches, he was behind.

After a single on an 0-1 count by Mike Aviles, Carrasco gave up an RBI double to Melky Cabrera on a 1-1 pitch. And then each of the next two hitters (Alex Gordon, hitting .353 in the early going, and Billy Butler, hitting .368) singled through the box. To his credit, Carrasco defused the situation with a foulout and a double-play grounder (to Francoeur), but ... it's weird, it's like all of a sudden, the Royals turned on a light and said, "Oh, yeah, he throws it

right there

."

And then they whacked the snot out of the ball.

Let us not question whether Carrasco has sufficient "stuff" to survive at the major-league level: he clearly does. I don't trust the gun at the K (Royals bloggers have questioned it in recent years), but I do accept that Carrasco is throwing in the low-mid 90s, which is plenty.

He seems to have some adequate movement on the ball, usually generating more grounders than flies.

And look: before the sixth, his start was outstanding.

Even counting that and the leadoff hit in his 7

th

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inning of work, Carrasco finished with pretty sound numbers: 3 runs on 7 hits in 6 1/3 IP, including 65 strikes in 93 pitches.

He commands the strike zone well.

But if you'll remember the Angels game, there was the comically-implausible error by Asdrubal Cabrera that ended his shutout bid, and shortly thereafter, he gave up a mammoth homer on a horrifying pitch. So at this point, the one question I would have about Carrasco would be, "Is there a concern that the still-young Carrasco might need development in the ability to regain his concentration after something goes wrong?" (It should be noted that this was an issue in evaluating him as a prospect.)

Before you get too defensive, I do understand that getting OUT of the 6th obviously required some degree of focus and real skill.

And he limited the damage in the 3

rd

, turning runners on 2

nd

and 3

rd

with 1 out into 1 run on a sac fly and nothing else.

He's a pro.

I'm not questioning that.

All I'm saying is, right now, Carrasco looks to have very good stuff and commands it well. The

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one thing that distinguishes him between “hey, Carrasco’s going tonight, he usually pitches pretty well” and “cancel my appointments, I’m watchin’ Carrasco shut down the Placeholders tonight!” is the ability to keep one hit from becoming a string of three or four.

Sure, that describes not only a lot of pitchers, but kind of the POINT of PITCHING in the FIRST PLACE.

What I mean with Carrasco is a little more specific: he looks so CAPABLE of sawing through a lineup that I’m building the EXPECTATION that he SHOULD.

Not bad for what amounts to a “rookie-and-a-half.”

2) Terror on the Basepaths!

Shin-Soo Choo and Mike Brantley each stole their third bases of the season last night.

But this is not why I called.

In the top of the 3rd inning, Grady Sizemore led off with a double to right, his third extra-base hit in his second game. After all ball, Sizemore advanced to third on a single by Asdrubal Cabrera. And then on an 0-2 count, Shin-Soo Choo lifted a fly ball to deep center that was plenty deep to score Sizemore and give

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Cleveland a 2-1 lead.

Suddenly, a dark cloud formed over the first base box seats. A shadowy form emerged from the mists, with dark robes and a strangely spherical head.

Concerned whispers could be heard from the Kansas City fans ... it was none other than Lord Peraltamort!

Waving his ashen wand, Peraltamort spat harsh syllables as he hovered over the first base coaches box, and Cabrera began moving slowly with spasmodic jerks toward second base.

It was the dreaded Imperius Curse!

Surely he was not in control of his own body!

No one would intentionally take so foolish a gamble by running in so uncoordinated a manner!

Forced by Lord Peraltamort in the direction of second, Cabrera was thrown out and a big inning was avoided.

His work done, Peraltamort left the stadium with a chilling cackle. Only much too late did the jovial, dreadlocked form of Rubeus Mannygrid ride into the stadium on a gigantic motorcycle in the bottom of the 8th inning. After an error by Orly Cabrera and a walk of Billy Butler by reliever Raffy Perez, Mannygrid sidled over to Butler.

“You really can mash, young fella,” he said.

“I thought you retired, sir,” the DH said politely.

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“Yeah, I got some free time on my hands,” Mannygrid admitted.

Perez got Kila Ka’aihue to ground to Matt LaPorta at first. Inspired by Mannygrid’s appearance, LaPorta threw poorly to second. Mannygrid nodded his approval. Ma

The umpire at second ruled that Butler was safe because of the errant throw.

Mannygrid threw his arm jauntily around Butler’s hulking form.

“You know, kid, you’ve got the swing, you’ve got the build, you’ve got the D ...” he began.

“I don’t really have the D, sir. My coach won’t let me play first base again until he becomes an astronaut,” Butler lamented.

“No, don’t you see, man, that’s beautiful!” Mannygrid beamed. “Now all you have to do is hit!”

“Well, and run the bases,” Butler sighed.

“No, see, that’s even more beautiful, because if you’ll just step over here with me for a sec ...”

“Yeah, okay, I’ll just stand over here in the infield ...”

“And ... wait for it ...” Mannygrid motioned. “There! You’re out! No more baserunning! Only the sweet, sweet art of hitting!

I love this crazy kid!”

“Aw, man ...”

After this, Joe Smiff came in and walked Jeff Francoeur, and the entire state of Missouri fell through a rip in the spacetime continuum.

3) Adventures in Squander Ball

Carlos Carrasco did not allow for much in the way of “rallies” to occur, and his counterpart Kyle Davies somehow managed to cough up his Quality Start of the year as well. The Indians nickle-and-dimed a couple runs off Davies, but generally he kept them off balance as well as the board, striking out 7 Indians in 6 innings of work.

6 innings of 2-run ball lowered Davies’ ERA to 7.20 on the season, suggesting the Tribe might have missed a couple of opportunities.

Out came giant dope-smoking reliever Jeremy Jeffress, who immediately began the 7th inning by walking Mike Brantley on four pitches.

Brantley took third when Jeffress used up both of his accurate throws getting ahead of Matt LaPorta, buttering his hand and tossing one to Not Kila Ka’aihue and allowing Brantley to advance.

LaPorta then singled him home on a lunging broken-bat single.

At this point, Jeffress’ command didn’t so much “desert” him as “stood off in the distance, mocking him with lowered trousers.”

He wild-pitched LaPorta to second.

He got Jack Hannahan out, then walked Grady Sizemore, then walked Asdrubal Cabrera, then left the mound.

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With the bases loaded, Shin-Soo Choo greeted reliever Aaron Crow by watching 2 straight balls. Then, he cleverly swung through the 2-0 pitch. Then, he cleverly swung through the 2-1 pitch. Then he cleverly watched strike three and scored no runs whatsoever.

Inspired, Carlos Santana tried to swing through a 2-0 pitch, but popped out the shortstop instead.

The Royals got the go-ahead run to second base on a single and a bunt, but Al Escobar grounded out and Mike Aviles posted a swinging K against Vinnie Pestano on a full count. Sure , this was minor-league Squandering, but there's something to be said for the classics.

Not to be upstaged, the Indians put two men on against Crow on a pair of walks. They almost hit the ball out of the infield twice, but did not.

Jack Hannahan struck out, necessitated by the fact that they burned the only left-handed hitter on the bench (Travis Buck, now in Columbus) as a pinch-runner for Travis Hafner.

As a pinch-runner, Buck lasted one pitch, being forced out at second.

Kansas City was not going to take this lying down, not in front of the home fans. They were going to take this FALLING FLAT ON THEIR FACES, dammit!

After Alex Gordon reached on one of the more awkward pratslides into first on a throwing error by Peraltamort ... er, Cabrera, Butler walked, then got thrown out near second after he should have been thrown out

at
second

before

he was thrown out at second, then Smiff walked Francoeur, then the state of Missouri disappeared, then the state of Missouri was put back, but just slightly off so you couldn't initially find where you'd parked your car, then Smiff struck out Wil Betemit and the Royals had really one-upped the Indians in terms of Squander Ball Deluxe.

And then Cabrera laid down a poor bunt to not advance the runner and Shin-Soo Choo grounded into a double play to end the top of the ninth, but really now, that seemed pretty bush league in terms of really Squandering an opportunity. I mean, seriously. So hackneyed. So bourgeois.

The KC fans rightly scoffed.

Chastised, the Indians abandoned the entire conceit in the 10th.

4) Captains Clutch!

LaPorta's single in the 7th really did tie the game, and good for him, but I'll be darned if that was a good piece of hitting. He took a slider breaking to the low outside corner and tried to pull it. To his credit, he was able to haul the ball through the hole between short and third and it *worked*

, but that doesn't make it good hitting.

In the words of Brian McPeck last night on Twitter, "There was a lot of Andy Marte in that swing."

Note: don't look now, but Matt LaPorta is now hitting .260/.367/.460 with 9 RBI. The batting average is a little lower than you want, but that's credible production, even given that he's a first baseman. |

proclaim myself "encouraged" without actually being "convinced."

You know who was actually clutch? Shelley Freakin' Duncan. The man gets five plate appearances a week and won't get to play the field until Ned Yost is an astronaut, but on an inside mid-90s fastball from Tiny Tim Collins, Duncan turned on it and drove it into the corner for the go-ahead RBI. Look,

Duncan is a limited player.

But he sure can hit left-handed pitching, and he sure did a great job last night.

The rest of the inning was somewhat surreal: by pinch-running Adam Everett for Duncan once he got to second, we squeezed out a fifth run: because the throw on LaPorta's potential inning-ending double play ball was botched, Everett scored on the play. And then Jack Hannahan, 0-for-4 up to that point, mashed a double off the wall in leftish center, and Grady Sizemore drove him home with a blort single, and by that point I was pretty sure someone had tampered with my soda.

In the whole damn inning, the only things that made a lick of sense were that Orly Cabrera couldn't bunt and Shin-Soo Choo struck out against the lefty fireballer, who was left out there for the whole damned thing to the tune of 30 pitches.

5) In case there was not enough surreal for you there

And then Justin Germano pitched a perfect 10th, including retiring both Gordon and Butler, with 9 strikes in 13 pitches and ended the game.

Actually, is it time to reassess what exactly we have in Germano? Surely his initial outing against the White Sox was monumentally bad, no question.

But then, so was Fausto's, right?

Since then, Germano has made two appearances, each scoreless, each hitless.

His X-Treme flyball stuff doesn't play well with me (5:14 GB:FB, 3 K in 6 IP, a bad combo), but it's not like he's completely pointless.

I'm gonna stop short of demanding he be used in high-leverage situations, but maybe more than once a week might be in order.

6) Dueling leadoff men

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Sizemore banded out three hits and walked once in 6 trips to the plate.

Brantley singled and walked twice in 5 trips to the plate.

Neither guy is going to collect an outfield assist any time soon.

This is workin' out pretty good so far.

7) A word about roster construction

We ended up with Adam Everett as our **DH** last night. I understand this was a quirk of pinch-running, but ... your lineup should never have Adam Everett and Jack Hannahan in it at the same time. Really now.

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Naturally, we swapped Travis Buck out for a pitcher.